

‘No Room for Wishing’ documents Occupy Boston

By Joel Brown | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT SEPTEMBER 13, 2012

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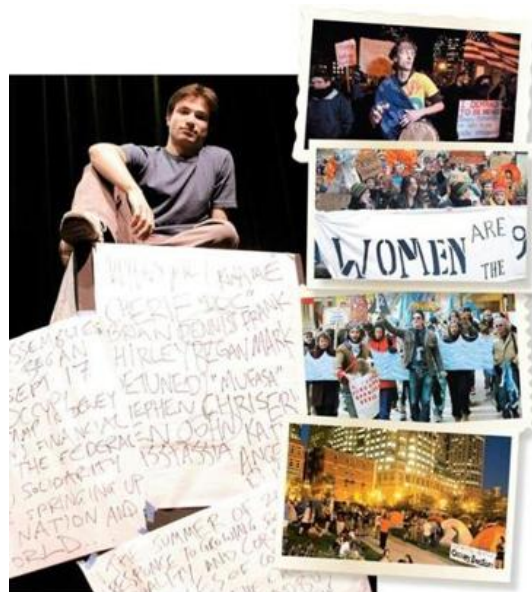
Soon after [Occupy Boston](#) started, on Sept. 30, 2011, [Danny Bryck](#) felt called to check it out.

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“I had always kind of had this frustration of wanting to connect my art more with my politics or social ideals or whatever you want to call it,” the actor says now. “I went down there for the first time around October sixth. I didn’t really have a super-clear idea what I was doing.”

Critics would say that lack of focus was typical of many who joined the Dewey Square protest inspired by the Occupy Wall Street movement. But, following a “vague notion,” Bryck brought along an old microcassette recorder and taped the first of what would become more than 100 interviews with protesters standing up for “the 99 percent” and what they called a fairer society.

Those interviews and recordings of meetings, speeches, and even police raids on the encampment form the text of “No Room for Wishing,” a one-man show that Bryck calls “a documentary play.”



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT; COMPANY ONE; JOSH REYNOLDS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE; PAT GREENHOUSE, BILL GREENE, MATTHEW J. LEE, ALL GLOBE STAFF

Clockwise from top left: Danny Bryck, an actor, was documenting Occupy Boston when he decided to piece together a play. Martin Hunter of Somerville at a Dewey Square protest last year; protesters joined in a women’s march in Chinatown last December; a march in the financial district in January; protesters last October at Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway.

NO ROOM FOR WISHING

A world premiere co-produced by Company One and Central Square Theater, “No Room for Wishing” runs through Sept. 22 at the Boston Center for the Arts, then moves to Cambridge Sept. 30-Oct. 9.

With the house lights up, minimal props, and no costume changes, Bryck aims to bring to life the hopes and causes of the protesters, as well as the circumstances that led each of them to Dewey Square.

“It was a crazy scene. It was sort of intimidating,” Bryck says. “The first thing that happened was, I was walking down this little thoroughfare in the camp, surrounded by tents and bustling people, and this guy leans out of this tent with this huge trash bag, and he says, ‘Hey, man, can you take this over to the Really, Really Free Market tent?’ So I said OK, and he told me where it was, and it took me like half an hour to find it because it wasn’t where he said, and I dropped off this bag of trash and I’m like, wow, I’m immediately involved somehow.”

The trash bag guy told Bryck he was too busy to be interviewed. But Bryck recorded just about everyone else he ran into, from anarchists to socialists, from veteran activists to barely political college kids to the homeless people who took root there.

“I wanted to hear people’s stories, why they were there, what they wanted out of this, what they wanted to see change in the world,” says Bryck, 25, who grew up in Amherst and lives in Cambridge. “It started to take on a life of its own.”

Bryck says he didn’t want to create a piece of propaganda, but rather present Occupy Boston in full, with all of its complexity and contradictions. There are voices raised against Wall Street greed, liberal passivity, racism, and capitalism. There are also personal tales of loss and ruined lives.

“Any good piece of theater, documentary or political or otherwise, we never want to be

Boston Center for the Arts, Plaza Black Box Theatre through Sept. 22; Central Square Theater, Studio Theater, Cambridge, Sept. 30-Oct. 9, 617-933-8600 (Boston Center for the Arts); 866-811-4111 (Central Square Theater).

Performing company: Company One and Central Square Theater

Ticket price: \$25

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‘I had to ask myself, what is my role here? Am I a documentarian or a participant? Am I affecting things by getting involved?’

didactic or educational. That's not the point of it," says Company One artistic director Shawn LaCount. "The focus really is about the actor's work with these words, with these characters. . . . I think he's trying to humanize the people involved."

At first Bryck had no idea how he would shape the piece, but as authorities moved to end the encampment and as conflicts emerged among the protesters, he found a framing story. He also found himself changed.

"I started to get swept up in it, too. I had to ask myself, what is my role here?" he says. "Am I a documentarian or a participant? Am I affecting things by getting involved?"

Ultimately he decided that "objectivity" was a myth to which he no longer subscribed.

"There was no way to come to know this thing without becoming a part of it," Bryck says, adding that traditional media coverage was, to his mind, largely a failure. Reporters "kept asking, 'What's the [protesters'] message? Why won't they make demands?' And I'm like, have you asked anyone there? Because to me they're really clear."

The movement Bryck calls "beautifully messy" left a permanent mark on him.

"I think it radicalized me somewhat," he says. "Once you expose yourself to, A, the reality of our national and global circumstances, and, B, people who are really, honestly, actively engaged with it, you kind of can't go back."

Bryck didn't stay overnight in Dewey Square. Among other reasons, he was rehearsing for a Shakespeare Now! Theatre Company production of "Romeo and Juliet" in area schools and wanted to keep that commitment. He's a relatively busy young actor and also works as a dialect coach for local companies. But he spent most of his free time until the end of the encampment in December among the Occupy protesters, trading his microcassette for an mp3 recorder and then an iPhone.

Interviews lasted from five minutes to two hours. He says he has no idea of the total time, but he transcribed much of the material. "It was definitely a painstaking process," he says. "But I couldn't think of how to edit it until I saw it written out." About 35 interviews are part of the final cut. Although the text has sometimes been trimmed or rearranged, all of the words come from the recordings, he says.

Early on, Bryck sought advice about the best process from Debra Wise and Megan

Sandberg-Zakian of Central Square resident company Underground Railway Theater. Once he had a draft, he held readings and workshops. Sandberg-Zakian directed the first reading and later accompanied Bryck to one in Catskill, N.Y. “She was driving us out there, and she looked at me and said, ‘Am I directing your play?’” She was, in fact.

Soon Company One came on board, seizing a chance for a long-discussed collaboration with Central Square. Boston Playwrights’ Theatre provided a grant and subsequently scheduled a single subscribers-only performance, to take place between the Company One and Central Square runs. Bryck also raised \$10,000 for expenses through a Kickstarter campaign that ended this week.

The title of the play comes from the song “Dewey Square” by Bryck’s friend Ruby Rose Fox, who lives in Jamaica Plain. Heard in the show, it includes the lines “there’s no room for wishing/ in revolution.”

A number of Occupy protesters have attended readings or workshops. Bryck says reactions have included a sense of closure, but he’s not feeling that himself, exactly. Although some see the Occupy movement as being on life support, he says he’s not the only one still inspired by it.

“I feel more connected now, and I feel the need to continue along this process of inquiry,” Bryck says. “I would bristle at the use of past tense.”

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